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AUTHOR	Baas, Alan M.
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ABSTRACT

This review surveys documents and journal articles previously announced in RIE, ERIC's monthly abstract catalogs, dealing with the growth of community schools. The community school is perceived to be the vehicle for the larger concept of community education -- a philosophy of education and society that radically changes the role of the public school in the community. The literature views the community school to be an educational, recreational, and cultural neighborhood center where adults and young people alike may use its facilities or join its programs, and where all members of the community could be involved in its decisionmaking processes. Included are discussions of the concept, the implementation methods, and the personnel of the community school. (Author)

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Community Schools

Alan M. Baas

The community educator is committed to the idea that people learn from the total environment. That is, the entire community is the school plant. All of the people are potential teachers. Everything in the community is a potential resource.

Totten (1972)

The movement to community school education stems from a variety of concerns about our children and our societal structures. People are realizing how socioeconomic conditions, racial prejudice, and a multitude of subtle environmental factors have a dramatic bearing on a child's ability to learn. There is also a growing recognition that learning is a lifelong process and the right to education should not be limited to the young. Community school education represents a serious and wide-scale attempt to respond to these factors through specific programs and activities and through a general reorientation of the community's attitudes toward schools.

The community school emphasizes parental involvement, stresses education as a continuing process open to adults as well as to children, and directly confronts its environment to clarify unique neighborhood characteristics while providing for their better integration into the entire community. The movement is young; no one is yet sure what these schools should do but there is a widespread conviction that community school education can be a valuable force for revitalizing our society. By serving as a forum for citizen

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expression and an encourager of community action, the community school promises real solutions to the problems of alienation and cynicism afflicting both our youth and our adults.

While there still exists some confusion in the definition of community education, community schools, and neighborhood schools, Baillie and others (1972) offer a good general description of each term:

> **Community education** is a concept based on a process of education for children, youth, and adults. The process refers to the organization of the community into appropriate size units to facilitate interaction, identification of local resources, and involvement of people in the solution of their own problems and the problems of the community. It is an effort to capture a sense of community without eliminating its pluralism.
>
> **Community schools** are vehicles that provide opportunities for community involvement and decision-making. They are for the entire community and are often located in the neighborhood school. (They need not be in the neighborhood schools to be community schools.) There are major distinctions between the *neighborhood school* and the *community school.* Both may offer similar programs, services, and activities, yet the community school concept is premised on the ultimate goal of community involvement and participation and is not necessarily based in the individual's neighborhood. The neighborhood school is usually oriented to skill attainment, personal enjoyment, and individual self-enrichment for a particular age group at a school in the individual's immediate surroundings.

Something of the significance of community education is reflected in the sheer volume of literature available on the subject, only a fraction of which can be surveyed in a review of this nature. Included here are representative documents and journal articles discussing the concept, methods, trends, and personnel of the community school.

THE CONCEPT

Community education, according to Kerensky (1972), is not a "preconceived package" to be tacked on to the existing educational structure. Rather, it is a process that "puts meaning into the notion that people can and should make an input into the educational system that serves their community." To help people understand the full implications of a totally mobilized community education effort, Kerensky discusses some of the misconceptions hampering its development and reviews the basic ideas behind the concept.

Successful community education depends on forming new sets of relationships among educators and citizens. It, therefore, requires new administrative attitudes and new assumptions about accountability and control that better incorporate the ideas, wants, and needs of the local community. In this way, the concept entails alternative organizational forms that decentralize and "debureaucratize" American schools by allowing individual communities to identify and solve problems at the local level.

Kerensky stresses that, as a process, community education lends itself more to description than to definition. Attempts, therefore, to "nail down" its philosophy in terms of product may freeze the concept.

Weaver (1972), on the other hand, argues that the practical and promotional orientation of community school education programs must be balanced by the development of sound theoretical definitions. Weaver does not contend that community education must be defined absolutely in terms of its product, but he does urge that theories be developed to systematize a framework of beliefs so that the concept might be examined critically by everyone involved in the process.

Theory development would also enable individual educators to test their own practices and to better communicate on a national basis. Weaver presents strategies for theory development and discusses several aspects of community education where good theoretical definitions are needed. These include community educators' emphasis on process rather than program, and questions as to whether or not community education is school-based or community-based, education-oriented or social problem-oriented, and whether it exists within a hierarchical organization or constitutes a social system of its own.

The articles by Kerensky and Weaver are among twenty in a recent issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* that was devoted entirely to the concept, trends, and methods of community education. While several other articles from this issue appear elsewhere in the review, it is not possible to give them all the recognition warranted. The journal's content is perhaps best summarized by Totten (1972) in his guest editorial:

> This special issue of the *Kappan* has several goals. Above all else it intends to establish confidence in the concept of community education and confidence that implementation of this approach to learning is within reach of every community. . . . The story of what community education actually is, how it can be implemented, what organizational and administrative changes and practices are essential, how the curriculum is developed, how the total community is involved, how the new dimensions can be financed, how assistance can be gained from materials and higher education institutions, and how progress can be evaluated is authentic.

A paper edited by Hughes ([1972]) describes the concept of the community school as it has developed in the United States. The community school transforms the traditional role of the neighborhood school into that of a total community center where education is considered a lifelong process for which the individual and the society are jointly responsible. Hughes perceives the underlying premise of the community school to be the belief "that the schools belong to the people, and that local resources can be harnessed to attack community problems." Thus the school may serve a four-fold role as

- an educational center where children and adults have optimum opportunities for study and learning
- a neighborhood center for cultural and recreational activities
- a center for social services
- a center of neighborhood and community life assisting citizens in the study and solution of neighborhood problems

In addition to describing the philosophy behind the community school, Hughes cites examples of what such a school can do and describes one particular school in operation. He characterizes the school's administrative structure and organization as "flat and not tall," and as one where the teacher is recognized as a fully competent decision-maker. Principals, superintendents, and board members should be "students of the

community's educational needs" and assume leadership roles in mobilizing the community's resources and interpreting the school's program to the community.

Clark (1971) discusses the concept of community education as it relates to the changing role of public schools. He calls for a reconstruction of our educational process so that it can better identify and meet the needs of the people it serves. Basic to this change should be recognition of the facts that "learning begins and terminates with life itself" and educational programs should not be limited to the young. Clark argues that the family is the most important educational institution in our society and that steps should be taken to integrate educational services with the needs of parents.

Cautioning that it is easier to identify our educational problems than to solve them, Clark sees community education as promising a viable operational philosophy for guiding future changes in the educational process. He visualizes the concept as moving in four sequential stages:

> *First Level*—High school completion, basic education, enrichment and recreation programs for community members of all ages.
>
> *Second Level* Programs and projects that attempt to have a positive effect on current community problems.
>
> *Third Level*—All educational agencies working together toward common goals, sharing resources, and complementing the services of one another.
>
> *Fourth Level*—The reconstruction of a total educational process under a philosophy of community education; "helping people to help themselves."

Clark concludes by presenting rudimentary guidelines to help community educational leaders realize the catalytic nature of their role as change agents.

Several discussions of the community education concept as it relates to urban conditions are worth noting. Douglas (1971) defines the philosophy of the community school in terms of the educational problems of big-city school systems. He perceives an energetic school-home partnership composed of the community, parents, leaders, and educators as essential to the success of any urban community education program.

The storefront school's value as a change agent receives attention in an article by Nelsen (1971). He argues that leaders of such a school must attend to the key issues of ongoing funding, relationships with the public school system, cooperative arrangements with other alternative models, accountability, and power control. Within the context of these issues, Nelsen describes the decentralized nature of the storefront school and shows how such a school can help disadvantaged youths gain a better understanding of their own abilities both on an educational and a social level.

THE MOVEMENT

A speech by Mattheis (1972) traces the development of the community school movement in the United States. He presents examples of successful programs in various areas and stresses the role of the local community and school district in the development of community schools. In addition, he describes what the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Office of Education are doing in relation to community education and outlines several governmental programs from which funds for community schools may be available. Observing that community education has much in common with career education, Mattheis concludes by recommending lay councils be established to better coordinate

the two concepts. Such councils should consist of members from business, labor, government, civic, and minority interests. They can be of assistance by making projections of local and regional job markets, reshaping curriculums to reflect the changing labor scene, stimulating industry and labor to work more closely with the schools, and generating support for additional funds.

In analyzing the potential role of the school as a site for integrating social services, Baille and others (1972) summarize the community education movement. They point out that community education has been initiated primarily by private sources and that local communities have had to rely on their own initiative to develop financial and nonfinancial support for their programs. Because the movement is young, there is little factual data or research available on the impact of community education programs. There is, however, clear evidence that such programs are becoming increasingly popular and are receiving positive response from taxpayers and all levels of government.

PROCEDURES AND PERSONNEL

Strategies for establishing community education are outlined by Carrillo and Heaton (1972). They emphasize that the people who are to live with community education programs should also be involved in developing them. Identifying and following a developmental process is critical to the establishment of community education "as a way of life and not just as an experimental program." To this end, the authors present and discuss fourteen steps:

1. Request information and/or assistance from an existing center for community education development.
2. Schedule a meeting involving a cross-section of interested school district personnel, community representatives, and community agency representatives to consider the application of community education to community life.
3. Schedule a meeting with the appropriate school district central administration personnel and school principals.
4. Schedule an exploratory meeting with the appropriate school district board of trustees.
5. The development steering committee members may wish to send a representative group to visit an existing community school.
6. Schedule meetings with the entire staffs of school buildings where principals have indicated an eagerness to provide leadership in the establishment of pilot community schools.
7. Schedule meetings with community residents and community agency personnel in school communities which may be potential sites of pilot schools.
8. Following these steps in the developmental process, the board of education and/or supportive agencies formally adopt the concept of community education and decide to establish a pilot community school.
9. Select a community education coordinator for the pilot school.
10. Release the appointed community education coordinator for appropriate community school education training, if he has none.
11. Implement the initial phases of the community school program.
12. Establish a community advisory council.
13. Initiate a detailed study of the wants and needs of the community.
14. Establish a plan of pre-evaluation, continual evaluation, and post-evaluation.

Olsen (1972) maintains that the real community school is organized around basic

life concerns and problems of living. It cannot, therefore, be contained within four walls but must reach out into all aspects of community life. Community schools should experiment with "genuinely life-concern-centered" curriculums that might effectively respond to and help focus the need of today's society for a true sense of "common-unity." Curriculums might explore basic life-activity areas such as securing food and shelter, protecting life and health, exchanging ideas, sharing in citizenship, enriching family living, and asserting personal identity. By emphasizing learning about present problems and future possibilities, this approach might better integrate education and living.

Ellis and Sperling (1973) perceive the most important task of the community school director to be organizing the various constituencies of his community. The authors observe that the alienation and cynicism prevalent in contemporary life reflect a sense of community powerlessness that might be combatted by an effective community education program. If such programs are to succeed, their directors must be skilled in leading people to organize themselves.

The selection and hiring of the community school coordinator is discussed by Nance (1972). To be consistent with the principle of community involvement, selection of the coordinator should be by a steering committee of citizens. The person chosen should be able to communicate with the variety of people involved in the program. Nance discusses aspects of the coordinator's role in terms of teaching, counseling, organization, administration, supervision, leadership, and human relations. He also discusses how the coordinator must relate to the program's organization and how he must be trained.

A brief article by Shafer (1972) describes the successful use of paraprofessional aides to assist a community school director in relating to the community. The aides developed a booklet explaining the program and its activities, organized block representatives, established an emergency-mother's project, greatly increased the numbers of adults attending education programs, coordinated home tutorial programs, initiated a preschool program, and established after-school enrichment programs.

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RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Successful community education depends on forming new sets of relationships among educators and citizens. *Kerensky (1972)*

Community education is a young movement that has been initiated primarily by private sources. *Baillie and others (1972)*

The most important task of the community school director is to organize the various constituencies of his community. *Ellis and Sperling (1972)*

Community schools should experiment with life-centered curriculums that respond to society's basic concerns of community living, including such areas as securing food and shelter, protecting life and health, exchanging ideas, and enriching family life. *Olsen (1972)*

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